



THE LEGITIMACY OF VARNASHRAMA DHARMA IN INDIAN DHARMA SHASTRAS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Dr. Mithan Das

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Ramkrishna Mahavidyalaya, Kailashahar, Unakoti Tripura

ABSTRACT

Classical Indian philosophy talks about Varna system. The reference of varna system is found in Manusamhita and Bhagavadgita. There are four varnas-Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Varna system in India is a division based on guna each of the varna possesses. These gunas are satva, raja and tama. But in course of time this gunas based varna system is changed and it becomes birth right. In my paper, I shall critically try to show the legitimacy of varna system.

KEYWORDS: Kshatriya, Raja, Satva, Shudra, Tamas, Vaishya, Varnadharma.

INTRODUCTION

Hindu shastras divides society into four varnas- Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. These division have been made on the basis of gunas like satva, raja and tama. Different gunas are the root of division in professions prevailed at the time. The duty of brahmana is to teach and to meditate. The Kshatriya is to fight, Vaishya is to do agriculture or business and the Shudra is to do manual work or to serve other three classes. The justification, Shastras give in favour varnadharma is that every individual possesses special guna according to which they must perform their duty. If one individual performs the task in which he is inefficient there will be imperfect productivity. In my paper, I shall try to critically analyse the appropriateness of varna system of Hindu shastras.

In my paper, I have used descriptive, comparative and analytical method.

Before taking the concept "Varnadharma" of Manusamhita, let me give some introduction about Manu and Manusamhita. It is believed that Manu is the first king created by God who give life to all human beings. The Sanskrit law code, Manusmriti was written by him. Here, I shall not deal with authenticity of Manu i.e. whether his character is real or mythological. My point of discussion is Varnadharma, promoted by Manusmriti, is considered as the backbone of Hindu religion. It is believed that individuals following duties as suggested by Varnashrama Dharma, attains spiritual growth.

During the age of Manu, life style of people were simple and primary professions are less. Professions were broadly classified into four- Education, warrior, business and manual labour. The profession which involves with teaching and acquiring knowledge is called Brahmin. Kshatriya is involved in fighting and protecting the state. Vaishya is involved in doing business and agriculture and Shudra is considered as one who help rest three classes.

The division of labour in Varnadharma is natural and logical and a type of cooperation among them the different classes. It is also a necessary division for welfare of the state and society. The function of classes has been given importance in Varnadharma. The similar classification has been found in Plato's Republic. According to Plato, greatest possible happiness of the

community as a whole was promoted for its being divided into – rulers, auxiliaries and craftsman. (K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, 1952, p. 09)

The system of Varnadharma is supposed to support the distribution of duties and responsibilities consistent with one's natural aptitudes and capacities. Now if individual performs duties within the sphere of varnadharma, his highest capacity will be flourished as well as wellbeing of community will be reached. These are the arguments put forwarded in favour of Varnadharma.

But what goes against Varnadharma when the duty of particular varna is not based on one's capacity and talent rather taken as birth right that is taking birth in particular varna is the deciding factor of one's varna. B. R. Ambedkar's life can be cited as lively example that is in spite of having highly educational qualification and intelligence, his varna is considered as Shudra and has to suffer a lot due to another loophole of Varna system i.e. untouchability.

Another feature of Varnadharma is equal respect for all the varnas though certain privileges have to be given to those varnas whose professions require highest effort in term of intelligence. But in course of time Varnadharma transforms itself to caste system which gives more importance to higher varnas and deprives the lowers varnas to fulfil their aims and desires as a human being. Shudra is deprived to have education, to get entry into temple, to have water where higher varnas have access.

Though there is a controversy regarding actual interpretation of Varnadharma that caste system is a part of Varnadharma or not. In his regard, I would like to refer M. K. Gandhi's opinion in his Harijan Patrika. He says that in Varnashrama, there is nothing injustice like inequality in terms of respect, prohibition against intermarriage, inter-dining etc. But as a moral and democratic citizen considering one individual on account of his varna as untouchables is injustice and it is immoral. Though Varnadharma is out of fashion now but caste system which is grown out of varna system cannot be annihilated completely. Doing one's duty in accordance with one's capacity and intellect is good for the society as well for the citizen himself. But everyone should have equal access to have the environment to flourish his capacity. There must be equal respect for all Varnas

as everyone's contribution is necessary for the society.

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